

The Sun

Robbery suspect denied bail; Violent history, risk of flight noted by judge

by Caitlin Francke and Scott Higham SUN STAFF

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Christopher Wills, freed by a Baltimore judge because his case took too long to go to trial, was ordered held without bail yesterday on a federal charge for allegedly sticking up a supermarket that is engaged in interstate commerce.

Calling him a danger to the community and a risk for flight, U.S. Magistrate Judge Susan K. **Gauvey** noted the violent nature of the 20-minute crime spree three years ago, Wills' long arrest record and an escape attempt as some of the reasons why he should be kept behind bars.

"There is a severe risk the defendant may not appear," **Gauvey** ruled after an hourlong detention hearing in U.S. District Court in Baltimore. "The defendant also poses a risk to persons in the community."

Assistant U.S. Attorney Thomas M. DiBiagio told the judge yesterday that Wills could be sentenced to a 20-year term if convicted of violating the Hobbs Act, which criminalizes interference with interstate commerce. The supermarket that he and co-defendant Kevin Cox allegedly robbed receives its products from Pennsylvania.

DiBiagio said prosecutors could file federal carjacking and weapons charges stemming from events April 20, 1996. A Super Pride market on East Northern Parkway was robbed, a family of five was forced from their car at gunpoint, and the keys to another car were stolen at gunpoint when two men barged into a home.

The spree ended when police shot Wills. He and Cox were arrested. But their case was dismissed in November by a Baltimore judge who ruled that prosecutors and judges violated the suspects' rights to a speedy trial and had conducted a critical postponement hearing without them.

FBI agents arrested Wills on Friday on the federal charge. Cox remains at large.

DiBiagio alleged yesterday that Wills tried to escape from a prison hospital the day after he was shot by police: He is accused of slipping out of his handcuffs and leg irons, punching a guard and breaking a window before he was subdued.

"We have a defendant who has shown an ability to escape a highly secure environment," DiBiagio said.

The prosecutor also said Wills has a previous armed robbery conviction and a long arrest record.

Wills' attorney, public defender Samuel Delgado, said his client -- who owns a home improvement business and lives with his fiancée and her mother -- does not pose a flight risk or a danger to the public.

Delgado also said that his client's confession was coerced by detectives and that little evidence exists to tie him to the crime.

Delgado said Wills didn't run when account of the crime spree was published in The Sun and won't run now. He said Wills shouldn't be punished for mistakes made by state judges and prosecutors.

"If anyone's to blame here, it's the state's system," Delgado told **Gauvey**. "The state failed to process this case in a speedy fashion. If someone's going to be punished, it certainly shouldn't be Mr. Wills."

Gauvey disagreed, holding Wills without bail.

Throughout the hearing, Wills consulted often with his attorney and appeared to be writing notes to him. During a break, when the attorneys were talking to the judge, he turned to his fiancée, seated in a front-row bench, and denounced his rearrest. In a jail interview Tuesday, Wills called it "vengeful prosecution" and politically motivated.

Federal agents had months to charge him after the dismissal, he said.

"Now I'm a threat?" he asked, shaking his head.

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